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AUTHOR Martin, Elaine Russo
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ABSTRACT

This two-page information review draws similarities between the work of teachers and executives, cites some of the research analyzing the role of teachers as decision makers, and argues the importance of teachers developing, in their minds and in the mind of the public, an image of teachers as executives. Nineteen references are listed. (JD)

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education
One Dupont Circle, Suite 610
Washington, DC 20036

Fact Sheet

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THE TEACHER AS DECISION MAKER

by Elaine Russo Martin

Teachers are seldom depicted as executives, even in the literature of education. Yet, like managers in business, teachers plan, coordinate, control, organize, and direct. Both teacher and executive perform these managerial functions by assuming various roles. This paper draws similarities between the work of teachers and executives, cites some of the research analyzing teachers' decision making, and argues the importance of teachers developing, in their minds and the public's, an image of teachers as executives.

What are executive functions?

Berliner (1982) wrote that in business or teaching, "the person who runs the workplace must perform a number of executive functions. These functions include: (1) planning; (2) communicating goals; (3) regulating activities of the workplace; (4) creating a pleasant environment for work; (5) educating new members of the work group; (6) articulating the work of the site with other units in the system; (7) supervising and working with other people; (8) motivating those being supervised; and (9) evaluating the performance of those being supervised."

How does an executive perform these functions?

Mintzberg (1973, 1975) held that a manager performs executive functions by undertaking different roles. These roles may be categorized as interpersonal, informational, and decisional. Traditionally, the classroom teacher has been viewed in an interpersonal role, or, as an information provider, in an informational role. The concept of the teacher as a decision maker involves a more descriptive image of the managerial functions teachers perform.

What does the decision-maker role include?

Mintzberg (1973) defined four aspects of the decisional role of the executive. The first is that of "entrepreneur," in which the individual is expected to create new ideas and become prominent in his or her field. The second is that of "disturbance handler," in which the executive is expected to manage crises. Third is the "resource allocator," a person who supervises personnel and budgets. The last is the "negotiator," one who chooses among alternatives or finds compromise between opposing forces.

How does the teacher act as a decision maker?

A teacher's decision-making skill is most often exercised with regard to classroom planning and time management. In planning, teachers identify goals and objectives, develop programs to accomplish those objectives, and evaluate the results of their programs. Time management involves monitoring attendance time, instruction time, allocated time, time on task, and academic learning time (Wyne and Stuck 1982).

What has been identified about teacher planning?

Morine (1976) attempted to ascertain the data (e.g., student background) that influence teacher planning, and to describe teachers' planning activities. Zahorik (1970, 1975) studied the effects of teacher planning on the actual teaching process and raised questions about the effects of planning on the classroom environment. Yinger (1977) attempted to formulate a theoretical model of teacher planning by identifying five time frames used by teachers engaged in planning and concluded that plans made by teachers early in the year affected teaching throughout the year.

The research on teacher planning is well documented in a recent article by Shavelson and Stern (1981). Most researchers assume that "teachers are rational professionals, who like other professionals . . . make judgments and carry out decisions in an uncertain, complex environment" (Shavelson 1982).

What has been identified about classroom time?

Researchers have examined various definitions of classroom time. Wiley and Harnischfeger (1974) studied attendance time (the number of hours or days the student is in school). Rosenshine (1979) focused on instruction time (time allowed for academics only) and allocated time (time allocated for nonacademic as well as academic instruction). Good and Beckerman (1978), Wyne and Stuck (1979), Stuck (1980), Anderson (1980), and others investigated time on task, the portion of instruction time during which students engage in learning. Finally, researchers such as Filby

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(1980) and Stallings (1980) emphasized academic learning time, that portion of time on task during which the learner is successful. The research on time is well documented in an article by Wyne and Stuck (1982).

Experts have noted a positive relationship between the time students spend learning and student achievement (Wyne and Stuck 1979; Stuck 1980). According to Wyne and Stuck (1982), "It is fair to conclude that as the level of time becomes more refined, moving from the most inclusive (attendance time) to the least (academic learning time), the correlation between time and learning becomes stronger"

The literature also shows that achievement is increased when teachers plan--a clearly defined managerial function--each lesson (Anderson 1980).

Why should teachers change their image to reflect their role as decision-making executives?

Teachers constantly make decisions regarding the selection and development of classroom objectives. Like managers in business, teachers rely on careful planning and time management to make decisions intelligently. Attention to the managerial functions of teaching, especially the functions of planning and time management, produces a more accurate image of the teacher. With such an image, teachers will more likely win the recognition accorded other executives (Berliner 1982).

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Elaine Russo Martin is user services coordinator for the ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education.

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